



# SERVICE-LEARNING CENTER

## Newsletter 2014-15

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### Letter from the editor

**Allysa Metzner**  
**Communications Coordinator**

As my time in the Service-Learning Center draws to a close I marvel at what this place has meant to me. As a person who has struggled deeply with taking ownership of the places I inhabit, I was surprised to find how much I have invested in this community, and in turn how much this community has invested in me. I have felt loved, hurt, lost, joyful and understood here. I have grown here and failed here. I've found a mentor and lifelong friends, but most of all, I have changed.

Ultimately I think this is what is at the heart of service-learning—change. Yet, what does change mean? It means allowing your service to transform you, it

means allowing your learning to impact you, and for those you “serve,” it means allowing that process to happen for them.

This year the Service-Learning Center has experienced more than its fair share of change. We have watched fellow staff leave and return, we have mourned over large and small issues, and many of us will leave for good this year; including our beloved department assistant, Chris Van Zanen and our wonderful Associate Directors, Megan and Noah Kruijs. So, dear readers, how has this year changed you? We hope that our partnerships and presence in your life has influenced change for good. In this issue you will find stories of all sorts of transformative reflections and experiences. Here at the Service-Learning Center we hope these stories impact you as they have impacted us.

### Patient, persistent, present

**Evans Lodge**

In early 2002, Calvin College's Nursing Department reworked their entire curriculum for junior and senior students, shifting the focus from acute care to a philosophy of community-based nursing. Modeled on a strong pedagogy of service-learning and the importance of providing nursing care within the context of culture, economy, politics and the like, the new curriculum levels the playing field for everybody involved. “As we sought to increase student experiences in the community, we wanted to be careful not to use the community for student learning. So, we deliberately designed clinical opportunities that not only promoted rich learning experiences for students, but also allowed us to serve and work to improve the health of our city.” Gail Zandee, the Community Partnership Coordinator for the Nursing Department, bases this shift on the

department's desire to live out the mission of Calvin as a whole, that of “being Christ's agents of renewal in the world.” Sitting in her office, tucked away on the second floor of the Science Building, it is impossible not to be drawn into the vision. Making this change wasn't always



easy, and Zandee readily explains how much initial investment was needed to gain the trust of neighborhoods in the city. In the past, when grants for similar programs at other institutions had run dry, residents told Zandee that health professionals simply left their neighborhood after a couple years of engagement. For Zandee, however, “finding ways to sustain a presence has always been the focus – we didn’t want to leave. Telling a community that you’re going to stay and that you’re in it for the long haul is crucial.”

With more and more national emphasis on health care prevention (instead of treatment), Zandee hopes that such a community-centric focus will train Calvin students to recognize the importance of looking “beyond the individual... to understand the context of family, culture, community, etc.” The impacts of the program have included much more than benefits for Calvin students, however; Zandee loves the program “because it emphasizes the power of listening to someone’s story... We’re seeing outcomes from our student and faculty work that show social change in our city. People who did not have access to care are finding primary care

providers, anxiety levels are dropping for women who are participating in depression support groups—we’re tracking health outcomes from student work in the community.”

It’s this kind of reciprocal relationship that service-learning programs around the country hope to foster. “I think students have learned so much more about justice issues in health care, disparities, the importance of promoting health equity, etc. They have learned about the multiple determinants of health by spending time in their practicum learning and engaging with the community.” When the students and the community both learn and grow together, it is “powerful stuff to watch,” says Zandee. “We want students not to just see this as an education, but as a civic duty to be involved.” The ultimate goal, she says, is for the community of Grand Rapids “not to need us.” A sustainable system of health is one that empowers clients to care for themselves, their families, and their neighbors; by supporting and training students and Grand Rapids residents in public health, everybody wins.

## Calvin living-learning

Teunis Verwijs

Calvin’s interim program enables students to study topics that normally would not be available during the regular semester. courses like “Local Food”, “Power and the Female Body,” “The Beatles and the Sixties.” Each topic delves deeper into subjects which many students only have a surface understanding of, and (Grand Rapids: The Interim) was no different. Lead by sociology professor

Joseph Kuilema and “Roman Williams, Grand Rapids: The Interim” led students to ask tough questions about the city they call home; a habit we value in the Service-Learning Center.

What is Grand Rapids on the surface? Forbes has called Grand Rapids “the best metro area in the country to raise a family in.” To visitors, Grand Rapids is a clean, well-kept city where people live in comfortable homes, have easy access to food, and feel safe and respected. Yet is that all there is to Grand Rapids? Like many other cities and towns in the United States, Grand Rapids boasts a tragic and troubled past as well as a triumphant one.

Consider, for example, the massive KKK rally that took place in Grand Rapids on the 4th of July, 1925—a day that is ironically devoted to independence and freedom. Perhaps this suggests that we have come far, or perhaps it suggests that we have not. After all, Grand Rapids was still listed as the “26th most-segregated metropolitan area” according to an analysis carried out in 2011.

Students who were involved in Professors Kuilema and Williams’ interim grappled with these questions. More than simply questioning, however, this interim also explored Grand Rapids and found evidence of different



narratives, particularly through interactions with the African-American community, the LGBTQ community, and the Native American community.

Students interacted with a number of local non-profit organizations, such as LINC Community Revitalization, Gays in Faith Together (GIFT), Healthy Homes Coalition, and the Urban League. Students learned about the destructive history of local boarding schools for Native American youth with a visit to the Ziibiwing Cultural Center in Mt. Pleasant. They met with city leaders and sat in on a meeting of the Grand Rapids City Commission, while also interacting with those outside these more formal channels, like Anita Moore, co-founder of the local chapter of #BlackLivesMatter, and an activist and organizer with the local organization Our Kitchen Table. Students also explored cultural institutions, like the oldest African-American art gallery in Grand Rapids, run by George Bayard.

Calvin students Libby Schimmel and Maaïke Mudde explain that the class had a useful “experiential aspect to it,” as the students drove around the city and professors pointed out features that might not stand out at first glance while providing commentary. Mudde and Schimmel both work at the Service-Learning Center, and have learned much about caring for and learning about the city they live in. This interim, however, had students from many different departments participating, many of whom did not know much about Grand Rapids. Mudde explains that there was a learning curve for everyone, as she personally tried hard to “[see] Grand Rapids from different perspectives without being voyeuristic.” An experience that provided a refreshing point of view for her was when members of GIFT (Gays In Faith Together)

“came and talked, and had unique perspectives on the city. Newness came from, through conversation, seeing Grand Rapids differently.”

And that they did. Schimmel came to see Grand Rapids as a collection of many different histories that created the place and continue to build it today. Through learning its history, she became aware of the “forces that change Grand Rapids...and how the place [she] calls home right now is a really fluid, changing thing.”

The forces that change Grand Rapids are representative of the many different groups within it. Mudde posits that in order to understand “social justice issues, you have to know the history,” reminiscing about how the group visited the Grand Rapids Urban League and understood it much better after “learning about Urban League’s connection to and distinction from the NAACP.” Through valuing community, placemaking, learning about who they were, and learning about who others were, students came to understand that life is multifaceted, and the city around them is, too.

Schimmel and Mudde look back on a successful interim, especially remembering an assignment where they had to visit a church. The church had to be one that was different in its denominational association than their own. This assignment was especially valuable because each student went on their own, becoming immersed in the culture of that particular church, at least for a couple of hours. Instead of being part of a larger group that allowed them to interact amongst themselves, both Mudde and Schimmel think of this experience as crucial because it pushed them to directly interact with those around them.

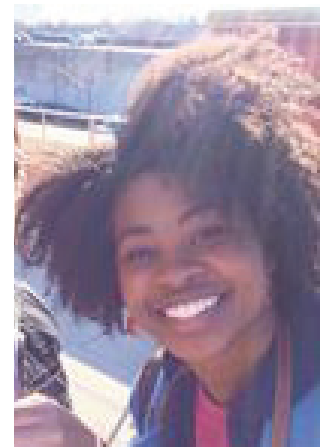


## Senior reflections

“ When I reflect upon my S-LC experience, I feel the need to expound on the exact moment I realized I was in the right place. Truth is, I do not have a eureka moment, but I have people who I think about on a daily basis. People whose stories I would like to see through to the end. I have been challenged again and again to think outside of myself instead of seeing the world as a system of connections but discovering a community.

I have to thank Jesus for allowing me to have this opportunity. I tell this story to my siblings: the night

before my application was due I cried. I did not think I would get it. I was afraid of failure. I was afraid of disappointment. I was afraid that all the negative things I thought about myself, would be manifested in my email form, telling me “Thank you for your time, but we had so many applicants...” Odds are I would not have finished



reading the email. That did not happen. I thought that I was just destined to cleaning homes and schools, like my parents, and although that is good work, I didn't have much else to dream about. The S-LC is where I discovered my passions for broken systems and disadvantaged people, where I declared that I wanted to do Social Work. The S-LC is where I strengthened my wings, once I knew I had them."

—**Nikita Miner '15 - ABSL Coordinator for Education**



“ When I decided to apply for a position in the Service-Learning Center during my freshman year at Calvin, I had just finished my fifth month on campus and, to be honest, had no idea what I was doing. I remember hearing from a couple of friends that the office had several open positions, and the



stories I heard drew my attention immediately - that it was a place deeply rooted in both the Calvin and greater Grand Rapids communities, that it was a diverse setting committed to facilitating conversations about racism and multiculturalism with compassion, that it was an office structured to

provide mentorship and guidance to students with a passion (however confused it may be) for justice... They went on and on. I wouldn't describe myself as someone who came into the office with expertise in any area regarding urban development and service, so I've been doing my best to learn on the job since I arrived. I've had meetings upon meetings with faculty members in the Natural Sciences and Math, I've visited different organizations around Grand Rapids and organized service-learning projects for classes across the Science Division, I've helped prepare and facilitate presentations on environmental sustainability efforts around the campus and city, and I've learned over and over again that I still have no idea what I'm doing.

It's been an important lesson, and it's been challenging. I've always had a hard time recognizing my faults, and I tend to get defensive whenever my limits are put on display. I'm prideful, jealous, and judgmental in ways I still don't understand. But for almost two academic years I've sat in an office that forgives me over and over, and I've been humbled

(although not quite humble). I've watched and learned from coworkers who courageously approach injustice on campus and around the world without hesitation. I've shared meals with students and staff who, with a discerning eye, point out barriers to peace that I've never had the chutzpah to notice. I've listened to anger, and I've witnessed forgiveness. I don't necessarily know how to package these experiences as I move forward; I don't think there's any set protocol for progressing from a position that has been so professionally and emotionally formative. But I know that, wherever I go, I bring the stories of this office with me. They are stories of resiliency and hope, of good conversation and way too much coffee. They are stories where I feel cared for, challenged, and known. So as I move forward, all I can fully express is gratitude.

Thank you, my friends, for knowing me and loving me anyway.

—**Evans Lodge '16 - ABSL Coordinator for Math and Natural Sciences**



“ After being recruited from a Prelude class during my first year at Calvin and spending a few semesters as a transportation assistant, I was given the opportunity to shift roles and become a student coordinator in this office. Though our two weeks of training at the beginning of my junior year included a few particularly challenging days (i.e. a cutthroat day of covenant writing and a bike tour I would prefer not to relive), I was quickly intimidated by the brilliance of my fellow coordinators. They had nuanced understandings of justice issues, were up to date on worldwide current events, and could easily put complex thoughts to poetic words. Jeff gave us a spiel at the beginning of it all which reassured us that the “imposter complex” was perfectly normal, but for some reason I was sure I was the exception to the rule and that I was, in fact, the true imposter of the group; it would only be a matter of time before I was found out and thrown out of the office for good. I hadn't claimed particular stake in any specific justice issue, and I generally opted to listen rather than speak – after all, as a white, middle-class, suburban omnivore who drives a car, I frequently ended up a secret (or sometimes not-so-secret) member of our discussion's theoretical enemy camp.

There have been times in this place when I have felt misunderstood, when I have felt guilty for being who I am, and when I have wondered how I ever got hired in the first place. I take small comfort in knowing that I am not alone in this musing, though the question still

bears a weight. But over time, I have grown more and more grateful for the fact that, whatever the reason for my employment may be, that that reason exists



(even if it does turn out only to be my exceptional handle of spreadsheets).

This is a place where I have learned to find my voice, to seek to understand my own identity, and where I have had the honor of listening to and being changed by the stories and perspectives of some of the most passionate students

at Calvin College. It is here where I have made dear friends who teach me to stick up for myself, who assure me I have important things to say, and who remind me not to take myself too seriously. We've panicked over math here and argued over Christmas trees here and consumed more cups of coffee than should be allowed here. Friends in this office have taught me it's okay to like videos of puppies bumbling down the stairs as long as I still lament the murders in Egypt and in Ferguson. I have gained the mentor- and friendship of a woman who teaches me what it means to be brave, to listen, and to reflect on where we've been, all the while making me laugh until my

sides hurt and reminding me of my mother. I have the privilege of working a job that makes me spend my car rides considering cultural appropriation and my showers rehashing my food's journey from the field to my plate. My job is exhausting and leaks into my off-the-clock hours, but it has helped me see who I am.

Though I have learned so much in this office, both as a professional and as a participant in humanity, I can say I am most grateful for learning the importance of letting others know they are heard. Each person has something worth saying, and someone allowing you to share your story without trying to change the ending or wishing they could rework the characters is a gift not everyone receives. I have been blessed with being found by particularly wonderful friends who give me spaces where it's safe to be myself, to think what I think and to feel what I feel. I can ask questions without being judged for not already knowing the answer and can explore ideas without it being assumed I have an agenda. We sit around living rooms and ask painful questions without automatically slipping into defense, and we are slowly learning how to enter into conversation without assuming we already know the whole story. I can change my mind without being wishy-washy and I can stick to my opinions without being labeled as stubborn. I can be who I am right now, in this moment, without being condemned for failing to already be what I ought.

—**Jessica Furno '15**  
**Spring Break Trips Coordinator**

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## Inside the warehouse: serving with Feeding America

Anna Lindner

One of the most fundamental human needs is food. However, many Americans go hungry every day not because there is not enough food, but due to lack of access. Feeding America, a central warehouse, collects, stores, packages, and distributes food to local charities and churches. Feeding America reduces waste by providing food for those who face hunger. As an office committed to social justice, the Service-Learning Center partners with agencies like Feeding America in order to both promote nationwide food access and educate students about America's food system.

I visited Feeding America to learn more about the organization and deepen their partnership with Calvin. After being warmly greeted in the office by employees, I am ushered into the back of the Feeding America warehouse. Dena Rogers, the volunteer coordinator, leads me through a door into a large room. Their small office gives way to a large storage room, where I spent the majority of my visit. As Ms. Rogers leads me through the storage area, I glance around, eyeing the boxes of food towering far above me. Volunteers bustle around, unpacking boxes and re-organizing food into family-sized portions. They exchange greetings with one another; it is clear the warehouse fosters a close community.

After a lively conversation with a fellow worker and friend, Ms. Rogers offers me a seat in their break room. I ask her about their warehouse's partnership with Calvin. She tells me that Feeding America has been a StreetFest site since 2006. During StreetFest, she explains, Calvin students help prepare food before it is shipped to smaller, local agencies that directly distribute the food to those who need it. "We save what we can; that keeps good food from going to the landfills," Ms. Rogers emphasizes. Feeding America often receives shipments from food industries with surplus food that has been rejected for aesthetic reasons.

Ms. Rogers elaborates on Calvin students' experiences at the Feeding America warehouse. Because she believes learning should be promoted when students serve, she always tries to lead a reflection time. Ms. Rogers tries to impress upon the students that when people go hungry, "there are environmental, health, economic, and psychological impacts." In an attempt to better understand the issues, Feeding America has had students complete hunger studies by conducting surveys. That way, not only are students completing physical tasks, but are also learning from the process.

Working with Calvin students has been a positive experience. Ms. Rogers observes that college students in general are energetic and involved. In particular, she notes, "Calvin students are hard-working and punctual." She confides that Feeding America could not keep up with the large amount of food delivered to them without volunteers. When discussing Calvin students' awareness of social issues, Ms. Rogers

tells me, "It's eye-opening to realize the problem is bigger than you first imagined, but solutions are simpler than you think." Rather than trying to change the world by themselves, Ms. Rogers adds, students should plug into existing programs. "That way, they discover their talents," which is an important part of student growth. Ms. Rogers also details how students can get involved: "They should simply ask, 'What are the needs?' and then try to help fill them." Personal involvement spurs a student to find his or her place in the organization. "The student's interest is sparked," explains Ms. Rogers.

Another theme we consider is the possibility of mutual, unintentional hurt sometimes accrued by service-learning. Ms. Rogers believes that not much harm is done. "We allow clients to choose which food they want, which not only limits waste, but also preserves human dignity." She also notes that StreetFest students take pride in the work they do. "They want to finish the job; they always ask where all of the food is going," which encourages Ms. Rogers.



Ms. Rogers remains optimistic about the future of Feeding America because

access is improving. "People are more aware of waste. There is growth in legislation and the welfare program has been reformed." She tells me happily that both donations and volunteers are up, and Calvin students help make food recovery and distribution possible. Agencies like Feeding America not only limit waste and feed the hungry; they also provide students with the opportunity to engage with the food system cultivate a passion for fighting injustice.

..... VISIT [feedingamerica.org](http://feedingamerica.org) .....

# A glimpse into the past: looking back with Chris Van Zanen

Allysa Metzner

If you know anything about the Service-Learning Center, odds are you recognize Christine Van Zanen, better known as Chris to most.

Maybe it's her contagious laugh ringing through the office that sticks out in your memory, or her ability to answer any S-LC-related question that you recollect. Whatever it is, Chris has been a staple to the Service-Learning Center for over a decade.

For those who have worked in S-LC, Chris is like the fairy god mother of the place, granting wishes and making difficult situations vanish. It is therefore sad to announce that this year marks the end of her career as department assistant, as her impending trip to Lithuania lurks on the horizon. Together Chris and I have spent time looking back on her experiences—those that have shaped her and those that have inevitably shaped the office. “I have really loved being here,” Chris reminisces tearfully. “This is one of the best experiences I’ve ever had.”

For Chris, her work in the S-LC is an experience so long and rich that it is nearly impossible to put into words. Yet she tries nonetheless by recounting stories that have changed her life. S-LC student coordinators have found that her work has created an aura in the office, and her presence is pivotal to their experience.

It all began over 10 years ago around a campfire where she met Jeff Bouman, who would later become Director of the Service-Learning Center, and his wife Julie. The Boumans saw her as a great fit and encouraged her to apply for the job. Twelve years

later, she believes it's one of the best things she has ever done. “I really appreciated that Jeff valued my strengths and allowed me to function in those strengths. I see that for students, too. Jeff tries to figure out who has what strengths and how those can be utilized, but also where you can grow. I really appreciate that.”

The Service-Learning Center has lead Chris to grow spiritually and professionally, as well as emotionally. It has been a place that has shaped her family and made her into the person she is today. What is more, the longer Chris has been here, the bigger her family has become as the staff of the S-LC became her family, too. Teaching student staff the ropes of working pre-professionally and sharing many hard experiences in the office bonded many of the students and Chris. An experience that really sticks out for Chris is when a few students got together and put on a day of appreciation for her, which is still a tradition today. “The very first Chris Appreciation Day, I was totally caught off guard. It was so funny,” she remembers.

“Jocelyn Jones, Devin Byker, and Ryan Krus wrote a skit about me that the staff performed. I had absolutely no idea. Then I just thought that it was a one-time thing, but we’ve done it almost every year. I’m a person who needs to feel appreciated, so that totally did it for me. But it wasn’t just that I was appreciated, it was that I was known. They did things that showed that they knew who I was.” Chris Appreciation Day is only one example of the connectedness Chris has had with the staff.

Her work has been an underpinning to life in the S-LC and she has been there to share the challenging and defining moments of many a college student. Yet, Chris has gained much from these experiences as well. “Contact with students always challenges one to think differently about the world,” she says. “I love the learning that being in an academic community brings to my life. Students are always asking challenging questions intellectually and practically about how to live life and honor God. Struggling through issues with them, traveling on trips with them, crying and rejoicing with them has been such a joy and privilege.” It is these types of relationships that Chris will miss the most, as the people who have become like family come and go. “I love visiting with them several years after graduation, being invited to their weddings, I hope I have made a small difference. Working in an office where you are known, appreciated, and part of a team of people eager to learn, grow and serve is an incomparable gift.”

With her impending departure, Chris has spent many hours thinking and talking about what she has learned from this place but it is who she has become, that will have the most lasting impact on here and where she is to go. “When considering several changes



in my life and employment, my youngest daughter cautioned me in saying, ‘remember this change will shape who you are and therefore, who we are as a family, much like the S-LC did’. What a statement.

The S-LC has certainly shaped my mind, heart and reality,” she says. We can only hope her next experience will be as rich as this one.

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## Understanding God’s dream for the world

**Jeff Bouman, Director of the Service-Learning Center**

Between August and the end of December, 2014, I was away from my role as director in the Service-Learning Center, while I served the college as the faculty director of the study abroad program in Budapest, Hungary. With me were 16 Calvin students, as well as my wife and daughter. In Budapest over the past four years, we have developed a growing network of schools and agency contacts where Calvin students have now been spending time participating in service-learning activity since 2011. Some of my most meaningful cross-cultural experiences have come about as a result of these partnerships across the city of Budapest.

For example, near the end of my time last December, after the students had already departed for home, I met with a person who represented an agency where we have placed students four years in a row, the Reformed Refugee Mission Center (RMK), in order to learn more about a potential new site for Calvin students to be placed in next year. It was a tanoda, or an after-school tutoring site, where kids from a particular neighborhood in northern Pest, mostly from a Roma, or gypsy background, can come to study, to learn skills in dance and in boxing, and to simply be safe between the time school ends and parents return home in the evening. The building where these activities take place is also a museum of Roma history in Hungary—a place of deep learning about a people in Hungary that has existed on the margins of society for a long time. The woman who joined me

as my translator from RMK was a young immigrant to Hungary, originally from Mongolia, who speaks fluent English and Hungarian. Hungary has struggled to be a welcoming society to foreigners in general, and its language alone makes for a substantial barrier for anyone hoping to move there. I didn’t learn my translator’s entire story, but I inferred enough to imagine that her life in Hungary, since age 9, had not been entirely smooth and welcoming. Yet here she was, involved in the work of an agency that works with refugee resettlement, and serving as a cultural and linguistic translator for me, in the hopes that Calvin students might next year find themselves able to serve and learn from a Roma population, one of the most marginalized people groups in Hungary. I was deeply affirmed in our attempts to provide our students with cultural learning opportunities.

Since returning to the US, and to Calvin’s campus, I have resumed my responsibilities, and I have been in transition for a few weeks now. I find myself reflecting daily on the amazing privilege of my work; and on the similarities and parallels between the service-learning activities in Budapest and those in Grand Rapids. In both places, students are meeting people, and participating alongside deeply committed people, often in places that are slightly off the beaten path or out of the limelight and the mainstream, and they are finding that they share a common humanity, and a quest for human flourishing, or as Desmond Tutu put it, for “God’s dream for the world.”

